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Cuba: School for U.S. radicals

The odyssey of a black

militant

8th in a series

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DETROIT — Hunted on a charge of kidnaping in North Carolina, Robert F. Williams fled to Cuba in 1962.

For five years he made such vitriolic, viciously anti-American radio broadcasts from Havana that in most countries of the world he would be liable to treason charges.

From Cuba he went to China, where he stayed for two years as a personal guest of the Chinese Communists and edited a newspaper urging Negro GIs to kill white GIs.

But the story of Robert Williams, black militant, has an unusual twist.

Today he is living in a pleasant, tree-shaded suburb of Detroit. Pleased to be home, he is going to write a book about his "experiences" once he rests up.

WILLIAMS' odyssey, more than anyone else's, exemplifies the conflicts that have marked Fidel Castro's long and expensive attempt to revolutionize American blacks.

For Williams, it ended with such disillusionment that he says today, with a bemused smile, "Remember in the South they used to slap the black man on the back and give him a cigar? Well, it's the same in Cuba, only it's a Havana cigar."

Williams sat in the living room of his brother's neat, middle-class home in Detroit and reminisced about his five years in Cuba — years that represent one whole era in Castro's approach to American blacks.

"The problem in Cuba was that the Cubans had a position on the black struggle," Wil-

liams began. "It was strictly a class struggle, from their point of view, and eventually the white workers would rise up and force the world to liberate us."

WILLIAMS was wearing an African-patterned sport shirt that complemented his Afro goatee. He shook his head, then — an ironic smile on his lips — said:

"They actually believed that we are the natural allies of the white working class."

"I openly disputed this. I had found that the whites in the South who helped us were the intelligentsia. None of the farmers or the millworkers helped us. They were the ones trying to kill us and standing on the sides jeering."

"One day the municipal leader of the party in Havana called me and said he couldn't support my position — that was in '64. One reason they couldn't support black nationalism, he said, was that it advocated division and self-determination."

"If they supported us — well, they had a heavy concentration of black people in the Oriente (province). What would happen if they wanted self-determination? I told him I understood their predicament."

"I said that in the United States people who made compromises like that were called Uncle Toms. I wasn't going to be an Uncle Tom for capitalism, or for socialism either."

IT WAS different in 1960, when Williams, an NAACP official in North Carolina, first visited Cuba on a cultural delegation. And it was different in 1962, when Williams fled what he says is a frame-up kidnaping charge and took refuge in

In those days Premier Castro — who operates on personal likes and whim — took a personal liking to the affable Williams. He told any of his men who criticized the black nationalist, "Williams has been in the South, and he has been struggling, and he knows."

The Cubans gave Williams a house, a car and gasoline, plus \$400 a month as an "allowance." This made him one of the most affluent men in Cuba, one of the elite.

TYPICAL of his florid, racial-rhetoric broadcasts to the United States in those days was one on Jan. 19, 1963, in which he said:

"Johnnyboy Kennedy paid a surprise visit to a convention of what he called 'Negro women sororities.' Man, these phony politicians are a riot when they want black votes. Now can you just imagine slick John putting himself out for the black bottom chicks?"

American intelligence agencies say Williams got "substantial funds" from Castro as early as 1959 to found the Committee for Just Treatment for Cuba. Later he helped found the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, another group of American intellectuals who supported Castro.

Philip Abbott Luce, a young American white radical who led a delegation of students to

Cuba in 1963, saw Williams there. Later, when he turned conservative, Luce wrote that Williams had been giving guerrilla training to American blacks when he saw him.

Williams denies it. He says he once asked Castro for money for training but was turned down because "they didn't want anybody doing any training that was not under

He adds, however, that young black militants today are getting military training in Cuba.

WILLIAMS, however, certainly was active in propagating violence from his Havana "support area." His newsletter — the Crusader smuggled into the United States at the time, supplied sabotage instructions that federal investigators said were used in the 1964 Harlem riots.

Williams at the time also was chairman-in-exile of the radical Revolutionary Action Movement. The three persons arrested in 1967 for an alleged plot to blow up the Statue of Liberty were members of RAM, according to the U.S. government.

Little by little, Williams says today, his initial infatuation with Cuba paled. "You know," he said, as he reminisced in a six-hour interview, "when I went to Cuba for the first time, I found great strides were being made for the black people."

"Then they declared Cuba socialistic. After that, there was more racial discrimination."

"After the declaration of socialism, Russians, Poles and Czechs all started coming to Cuba, and Cuban students went to those countries. The black Cubans started siding with the Africans, and the whites with Europeans."

"Black students who went out with white girls in East Europe caused friction, and the Cubans devised a quota system under which most of the students who went abroad